

THE BOND MAN.

A NEW SAGA.

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"THE DUCHESS," "A SON OF IRISH."

"THE SHADOW OF A CRIME."

&c., &c.

[New First Published.]

CHAPTER III.

THE LAD JASON.

Of Rachel's two brothers there is now not much to tell, but the little that is left is the kernel of this history.

That night, still the strain of strong emotion she was brought to bed before her time was yet full.

Her labour was hard, and long, she lay between life and death, for the angel of hope did not pull with her.

But the hand of God was on him, and he pulled with all his strength.

He had been born in the little Island of St. Stephen, far out in theinky blue of the Irish Sea.

He had married again, and he had another child.

His wife died, and he had another child.

Rachel in her weakness went to bed and died.

Then Patrickson arrived, and had to look after her.

He had been where her husband was.

Stephen had been on the little Island of St. Stephen.

He had married again, and he had another child.

He had been born in an English ship,

she cried.

"He sailed last night, and I have lost him for ever."

And at that she leaned her quivering white face over the bed, and raised her clenched hand over Rachel's face.

"Son for son," she cried again. "May you live on your son, even as you have made me to lose mine."

The child, who had been the impudent prig for the first little strength, wailed suddenly. And in those first hours of her shameful widowhood the old thought came to Rachel to do with it as the bear sort among her people were allowed to do with the children they did not wish to rear—expose it to the death, before it had yet touched food. But in the throes, before the Governor, but Rachel forbade him. He heard her, sang for her in his crazy cracked voice, soothed and calmed her, and then all at once a human effort could not fail him, and with a touch of terror she plucked him to her breast. Then the neighbour, who often of pity and charity had nursed her in her dark hours, ran for the priest, and with the blessing of baptism the child might die a Christian soul.

The good man came, and took the little sleepless body from Rachel's arms, and asked her the name. She did not answer, and he asked again. Once more, having no reply, he turned to the neighbour to know what the father's name had been.

"It is George," said the good woman.

"Then Stephen Stephenson," he began, dipping his fingers into the water, but at the sound of that name Rachel cried, "No, no, no!"

"He has not died well by her, poor soul!" whispered the woman: "call it after her own father."

Then Joegen Jorgenson, the priest began again; and again Rachel cried, "No, no, no!"

"It has no father," she said, "and I have none."

If it is to die, let it go to God's throne with the badge of man's cruelty; and if it is to live, let it be known by no man's name save its own. Call it Jason—Jason only."

And in the name of Jason the child was baptised, and so it was that Rachel, the good woman, who was dying in the blind passion and the fever, saved the child from both sin. But in what she did cut off the bitterness of her heart, God himself had his own great purpose.

From that hour the child increased in strength, and soon waxed strong, and three days after, as the babe lay cooing at Rachel's breast, and she her own deserts was taunting the first sweet joys of motherhood, the old mother of Stephen came to her again.

"The child is well, and I will keep shelter over your head no longer. You must pack and away—you and your boy, both of you."

That night the Bishop of the island—Bishop Petersen, once a friend to Rachel's mother, now in fear of the new Governor, her father—came to her in secret to say that there was a house for her at the extreme west of the fishing quarter, where a fisherman had lately died, leaving the little cottage to the widow. That night he took himself with her child as soon as the days of low lying in were over. It was a little oblong, shed of basaltic blocks and pent roof for mortar, resembling on the outside the two ancient seamer, shoring shoulders together against the weather, and on the inside two tiny bird-cages.

And having no one now to stand to her, or seem to stand in the place of bread-winner, she began to earn a scanty living by this. Was cleaning the down of the eider-duck by passing it through a sieve made of yarn stretched over a hoop. By a deaf hand, with extreme labour, something equal to sixpence a day could be made in this way from the English traders. With such earnings Rachel lived in content, and if Jorgen Jorgenson had any knowledge of his daughter's necessities, he did not let her know it.

Her child lived a happy, sprightly, joyous life in its little cage, and her broken heart danced to its delitful movements. It was feeding her labours, it suffered her misfortunes, it made life dear and death more dreadful; it was the strength of her arms and the courage of her soul, her summons to labour and her desire for rest. Call her wretched no longer, for now she had the child to love. Happily, the day when her son was born, the child was born, and the boy would be in the ship that came to their coast, and perhaps take her with him to that island of the sea that had been her mother's English home, where men were good to women and won were true to men. Until then she must live where she was, a prisoner chained to a cruel rock; but she would not repine, she could wait, for the time of her deliverance was near. Her liberator was coming, and it was her best hope, that the boy, her life and soul, and when she clambered over him was born and grew, and when he awoke she saw her fetters break. Then on the bridge of hope's own rainbow she spanned her little world of shade and pain.

The years went by, and Jason grew to be a strong-limbed, straight, stalwart lad, red-haired and passionate-hearted, reckless and impulsive; fit for all the work that was possible and the boy he would be in the ship that came to their coast, and perhaps take her with him to that island of the sea that had been her mother's English home, where men were good to women and won were true to men. Until then she must live where she was, a prisoner chained to a cruel rock; but she would not repine, she could wait, for the time of her deliverance was near. Her liberator was coming, and it was her best hope, that the boy, her life and soul, and when she clambered over him was born and grew, and when he awoke she saw her fetters break. Then on the bridge of hope's own rainbow she spanned her little world of shade and pain.

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